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If youngsters are to be helped and to be offered equality of educational opportunity, the tags, misunderstandings and myths which have blocked past paths to progress must be discarded and avoided. The term, "cultural deprivation" carries with it a contradiction in meanings. It suggests, very incorrectly, that a culture can of itself be deprived .

The professional person must behave in a manner which reveals his belief that the minority group member is his equal. Saying this is not enough.

Educators must come to realize that deprivation does not lead to one universal reaction; the same is true of cultural deprivation. All such children do not fail. That some disadvantaged pupils move through the school curricula successfully is an accepted fact. Many do desire further education.

The concept of "cultural deprivation", and all of its derogatory implications must be dropped.

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Cultural deprivation: A study in mythology

THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN from disadvantaged areas, although not new to the United States, has recently become a matter of national concern. The differences between the educational attainment of children from white-collar families and children from blue-collar families continues to widen. Ausubel (*1*), Hunt (*14*), and Deutsch (7) conclude that disadvantaged children are inadequately prepared to perform well in an academic environment and need preschool enrichment programs.[1]

In the past, educators have argued that it is difficult to teach disadvantaged children because their parents are not interested in education and therefore do not present their offspring with favorable educational attitudes. Other arguments have focused on the school's inability to motivate youngsters. At present, the term "cultural deprivation"[2] is used as the frame of reference for explaining academic failure among disadvantaged pupils. Riessman (*16*) explains the nature of cultural deprivation as "those aspects of middle-class culture—such as education, books, formal language—from which these groups have not benefited."

Errors and Dangers

Generalizations such as this one are too broad and far too premature in the light of the data from which they are extrapolated. In this instance, they are misleading and inconclusive. The HARYOU report (*11*) and studies by Cloward and Jones (*6*), Durkin (*8*), Lewis (*15*) and Cagle and Deutscher (*5*) have all indicated that the parents of disadvantaged children are "interested in education" and

In all fairness to Riessman, his view is certainly sympathetic to the minority group. Yet he fails to realize that by yielding to the usage of cultural deprivation, the inferiority status of the Negro is maintained, only in a more subtle and confused manner.

Many a catchword in education has proved a shibboleth, better scrapped than preserved. Such, it is argued here, is the case with "cultural deprivation," a term which suggests that those to whom it is applied are inferior beings, lacking in the distinctive human quality of "culture." Writing from their experience in the Institute of Urban Studies at Teachers College, Dr. Mackler and Dr. Giddings insist that the concept has only a mythological status of an offensive kind.

[1] Preparation of this paper was facilitated by a grant, 200-4-102, from the Welfare Administration, US Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The authors appreciate the suggestions and criticisms of Thelma Catalano and Herbert J. Gans.

[2] Many educators and social scientists would like to avoid this term or apologize for its usage by indicating its inaccuracy, yet "cultural deprivation" continues to be used. See (*16*, p. 3) for an excellent example of an apology for the use of the concept and its inherent contradictions. Despite this, Reissman uses it "because it is the term in current usage."

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are interested in their children's receiving a good education. The civil rights movement also attests to this fact. In the past, parents of disadvantaged areas rejected the schools and all they had to offer because of their own poor experiences and because they had no hope that education was really for them or their children. Today, partly because of the civil rights movement, many parents of disadvantaged children believe and see a hope that the schools can be an instrument for the realization of their own aspirations and the yearnings they have for their children. If Riessman (*16*) speaks about the anti-intellectualism of the disadvantaged, Hofstadter (*13*) points out that anti-intellectualism is pervasive in present-day America. Why, then, should the disadvantaged group be singled out as a prime example of anti-intellectual propensities when the majority of us are anti-egghead?

If these youngsters are to be helped, if they are to be offered equality of educational opportunity, we must discard and avoid the tags, labels, misunderstandings, and myths which have blocked the paths to progress in the past, are doing so at the present time, and will continue to do so in the future. The child from the minority group, particularly the Negro child, is already heir to the characteristics of caste status. As a member of a minority group, he carries the scars of every type of discrimination—legal and forced segregation. He also has limited channels of mobility. Far too often, we have used tags such as "cultural deprivation" as alibis for our failure to provide an adequate educational program for disadvantaged children. Every American Negro child is the victim of the history of his race in the United States.

For Clarity's Sake

Again, a closer consideration of the meaning of the words "deprived" and "culture" should help shed some light upon the apparent contradiction of the term "cultural deprivation." Sociologically, the word culture is much broader in meaning than in popular usage. Butts (*14*) defines culture as,

> . . . the whole way of life that is created, learned, held in common, and passed on from one generation to another by the members of a particular society. Culture is the sum total of ways of behaving that a group of people builds up and expects its members to acquire, share and live by. It includes the entire range of social institutions; the organized patterns of behavior; the customs and expectations; the tools and technology; the bodies of knowledge, thought and belief; the cherished ideals, values and sanctions; the forms of creative expression; and the language and modes of communication.

The Thorndike and Barnhart Dictionary (*2*) defines deprivation as,

> act of depriving; state of being deprived, and deprived as: take away from by force; keep from having or doing. Synonyms are: dispossess; divest; debar.

When these two words are used together, they entail a contradiction in meanings. They suggest, very incorrectly, that a culture can of itself be deprived, or that a culture can somehow deprive its members who depend upon it of the goods, skills, and behaviors which are necessary for survival and adjustment.[3]

One of the most important aspects of our present scientific-technological soci-

[3] At a recent meeting, Mackler presented findings that children in Harlem (this was prior to the riots) were being kept at home and that after-school peer relationships were kept at a minimum for fear of injury in the streets. One of the members of the audience maintained that this was cultural deprivation. If we have not agreed upon the definition of culture, then cultural deprivation becomes simply whatever we choose at different times. At times, education is lacking; in other instances, economic, familial, social, recreational, or peer relationships become focal.

ety is the rapid changes taking place in it. These changes occur at a faster pace than has ever before been experienced. The changes in our own culture, however, are not all taking place at the same rate. The material changes, by and large, come about more rapidly and are accepted more readily than the changes in institutions. In addition, the changes in ideologies underlying institutional and material change come about relatively slowly. And this resistance to ideological change —the unwillingness, for instance, to accept a minority group member as an equal—which by nature, is deeply personal, appears in the persistent but confused utilization of "cultural deprivation" as a central term in educational thought.

The professional person is still *saying* that the minority group member is his equal, but he does not behave this way. The Negro is looked down upon. The white professional is guilty on this score every time he says he has *the* answer, the culture, whereas the black man is "deprived" of *the* "culture." The caretakers, the persons who are publicly responsible for the well-being of others, have reared their heads again, and in the role of always knowing what is best; they dictate on the basis of their subjective values that the white man has the correct culture. Anything else is inferior, inadequate, and deprived. Until the white professional gives up his seat of omnipotence and looks at Negroes as fellow human beings, eye to eye, we shall not see true equality. As in psychotherapy or any comparable interpersonal relationship, when one person continues to define, restrict, or diagnose the other, there is little risk-taking on the therapist's part, little chance of both persons' learning and sharing with each other. And this appears to be the case when one continually uses a term like "cultural deprivation," which dehumanizes both the defined Negro and the white definer. It objectifies both as if there were no possibility for change and growth. It also continues the authoritarian tone of the nineteenth-century white abolitionist, looking down his nose while giving a genuine but arrogant helping hand to the Negro.

Persons Above All

The literature appears to assume that deprivation leads to one universal reaction. The research by Hebb (*12*) and his associates at McGill (*3*), as by others involved in sensory deprivation studies, reveals that the uniform stimulus of sensory isolation evokes a range of individual differences. Some subjects, although only a few, can adapt in a constructive way. Others show a variety of susceptibilities to deprivation. This variation is important in illuminating the continuum of individual reaction patterns that are available, ranging from adaptive to severely crippling and maladaptive.

A parallel situation seems evident in the concept of cultural deprivation. Given equally severe, incapacitating, external forces, all children do not fail. Individuals can and do succeed academically, economically, socially, and personally. Certainly, there is a preponderance of failing response patterns; still, a theory of deprivation—material, cultural, or sensory—must be broad enough to conceptualize more than one type of reaction. To state that deprivation leads to depressed reaction does not allow for individual reactions which, at times, can surmount the most depriving of situations, even concentration camps (*9*). The theory must allow for an understanding of the interplay of social forces and individual motivations and how these factors influence success and failure. An adequate theory of deprivation must eventually explain why certain pupils succeed and others do not, given the same social background.

ground. And we are still awaiting that theoretical formulation.

Meanwhile, we must recognize that in the United States, the shadow of slavery is still largely with us. Tags or labels like "cultural deprivation" do not help to banish the myth of Negro inferiority. For the enthusiastic worker, especially in the field of civil rights, such labels only complicate the existing problems, social and otherwise. They serve to promote strife and hatred and to perpetuate the myth that disadvantaged children are of inherent, inferior ability compared to children from more privileged sectors of our community.

In short, those persons whose behavior and beliefs do not conform to the dominant American culture patterns, are by no means without a culture. Realizing this central fact has implications for education of high importance. So long as our perceptions of our race-relations problem are in terms of the absence of culture, rather than of the presence of a different subculture, we will continue to misinterpret our difficulties and their basic dimensions.

Portrait of Achievement

Visits to homes in disadvantaged areas indicate that the label of "cultural deprivation" is singularly unfortunate. Many such homes are, by many criteria, comparable to those in more privileged areas. Children coming from them do not *all* remain illiterate. They experience success in school as a desired goal, and they sometimes achieve notable success within academic areas. A review of the literature shows that very little is really known about the attainment of academic success among disadvantaged youngsters except that it occurs with far more than chance frequency.

The information herein presented will attempt to describe the "disadvantaged" high achiever in science in a junior high school (*10*). The portrait is descriptive rather than explanatory for no attempt was made to observe the process (or processes) or how the students became this way. The hope here is that until more definitive identification is available, this sketch will help teachers, supervisors, and administrators to identify children from less privileged neighborhoods who show potential in science. And more important, this study may aid teachers in their *expectation* of success and in providing a class milieu that contributes to learning rather than defeats it.

The disadvantaged high achiever in science tends to come from a family background characterized generally as a working-class family in which one or both parents are usually gainfully employed as chamber maids, practical nurses, janitors, porters, or cab drivers. Unemployment is familiar. Usually, one or both parents are in-migrants to the city, in many instances coming from the rural South. In more than half of the families, the father is missing from the immediate family. Born and reared in the metropolitan area, the pupil has lived and attended elementary and junior high school in the same metropolitan area and has usually played in the street.

His parents or guardians are interested in the educational enterprise and tell him continually that they are interested. They inquire about his studies and help to budget his study time. They allow him to visit the local library regularly. Generally, he is receiving a free lunch at the school. Assuming that information on lunch applications is a valid evidence of need, one can describe the youngsters as from low socioeconomic circumstances. There are usually many persons living in the home, and there typically is no place which is conducive to study. The overcrowding in many instances is produced

not only by the achiever's own large family, but also by persons who rent space in the already jammed apartment.

Stance Towards School

Generally well adjusted in school, the achiever enjoys a higher self-estimate and higher aspirational levels than many of his peers. He also expresses himself orally and in written assignments much more efficiently than they characteristically do.

The high achiever in science, at least in junior high school, shows a general interest in science. He makes contributions to science fairs and science contests. Sometimes he is interested in electronics. He may have flying model aeroplanes as a hobby, or he may show an interest in raising fish in an aquarium. He usually indicates a choice of a scientific or science-related career by the time he is ready to leave junior high school, usually about age 14. In high school, he gravitates toward academic programs, and he is interested and participates in the competitive examinations for the specialized high schools of art and science.

Undoubtedly, disadvantaged pupils across the United States represent a genuine pool of hidden talent. This group has a great potential in our technological society in which we face serious shortages of trained scientific and technical ability at all levels. If high achievers in science, coming from disadvantageous backgrounds, can be adequately described and identified, they can play important social roles while healthily meeting their own strong needs for self-realization.

That some disadvantaged pupils move through the school curricula successfully is an accepted fact. These youngsters can grasp basic scientific principles. They can and must be prepared for a scientifically literate society. In order to help meet future demands and to help solve the present shortage of scientific talent, the recruitment of larger numbers of highly capable youth from disadvantaged groups will be necessary. The identification of the potential high achiever is mandatory if we are to fill the vacancies in the technical manpower pool.

But success in science is only one example of the inherent confusions and contradictions in the notion of "cultural deprivation." Similar examples can be found in the other academic areas. The point is that the successful child coming from disadvantaged areas indicates that some can do well. What is lacking is a means for schools to help these youngsters to alter their views of the situation, to rid themselves of hopelessness, and to dedicate themselves anew to the possibility of altering their circumstances. Teachers need to look freshly at these children and their parents. Parents, although desirous of a better education, are in need of professional guidelines and directions if their attitudes are to be converted into constructive behavior. Here again, the responsibility of the educator is to furnish new modes of teaching that incorporate parents and the community into the curriculum and that guide parents toward self-betterment and improved family life. To start on this road, we must purge ourselves of the concept of "cultural deprivation" and all its derogatory implications. If a concept is needed, then we must seek a more accurate, authentic, and honest term. If we conclude that no term is needed, perhaps that will be all the better.

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